

FOREWORD

Like the volumes which have preceded it in the *Quaderno* series, this book centers on a theme. And, like them, it does not mean to organize any discourse structuring that theme; it offers no general interpretation. Rather, what you find here are soundings and essays: professional, specific, knowledgeable and, at the same time, taken all together, an over-all invitation to look towards the broader, interdisciplinary possibilities, towards hypotheses of synthesis, directions in which patterns may be vaguely discerned.

The reasons for this deliberate breaking open, breaking up or breaking away are touched upon in J. Drummond Bone's comments on «Nationalism and Literary Fish». Drummond Bone's fish is the American pickerel which swims lyrically and ironically in Walden pond before Thoreau's interested eye, eminently itself in its materially watery milieu and, at once, projectively the quintessential American. Another fish flashes briefly in David Brion Davis's reflections on some aspects of the symposium from which these essays are drawn: it is a fish from the diary Lt. Robert Barker kept during the Sullivan campaign of 1779 against the Iroquois settlements in up-state New York, cited in Pierluigi D'Oro's paper, «The fish, too, that so long enjoyed peaceful habitation in these transparent regions, may yet become subservient to the inhabitants of this delightful country».

The real and the symbolic fish are in both cases linked to dominance and to nature as well as to national identity in ways whose complexity may defy rational sorting out and ordering, yet whose many «meanings» and suggestions are valuable to the historian as they are valuable to literary enjoyment. After all, John Adams felt he had said it all when he wrote home from the Paris peace talks that the «Tom Cod» had been defended and he did not, despite his reputation for dour New England sobriety, find it amiss to close the affirmation with an exclamation point. The «Tom Cod» being at once the staple of New England overseas commerce and local diet and the embodiment of vigorous «natural» virility; a virtuous republican «citizen» if ever there was one; indeed, a hardier, communitarian and work-a-day fellow than Thoreau's elegant and individualistic pickerel. Two moments of «nationalism» appear here and invite further reflection. What, for example, is the relationship of either - or of «the fish» of which both are examples - to the traditional fish-as-

Christian which both the above New Englanders had in their mental, cultural archives? Certainly Adam makes his comment in highly secularized years and a political context far different from that in which Thoreau's political activity consists in withdrawal and revivalism is a country-wide reality. And what of Lt. Barker's fish, who also is some sort of political subject, though not, it seems, a citizen?

The theme «People and Power: Rights, Citizenship and Violence» is, then, full at once of facts and of sensations, of as many and as significant gems as Joan De Jean uses to enter the context of lesbian, homosexual, judaic and antisemitic interweavings in fin de siècle French nationalism, German philology and the construction of the political idea of Sappho functional to that fabric.

Let me turn now to the title, to start off on another scouting expedition. «People» has meant a number of things over the centuries and only rarely «everyone» present in a given territory. In these pages you can find «people» as «lower classes» and «slaves», «blacks», «indians», and then they are seen as the oppositional - or counter - term of «power». Yet, that is not the whole story, for they are not without «power» - capacity to do and impose - but without «institutional power». Their doing and imposing exist outside the workings of organized government. Yet even this is a many-sided question, in that some of the doing and imposing from «outside» is, at the same time, very much «inside», to the point of being ritualized as part of the very exercise of organized government. In this sense «people» are «representing» their capacity to do and to impose in a sort of political theater which may be self-organized or choreographed - or even, as Le Cour Grandmaison suggests, both at once. In some sense, both Shaysites and «White Indians» seem to fall into this pattern. They defy and confront organized government (in ways which differ as the historic moment in which they occur differs); they are «put down», yet having «done it» is also an end-in-itself. Is there then a kind of political onanism in some manifestations of the «people»? And if so, when? What is the weight and significance of this kind of «political theater» in which the parts certainly seem to have prescribed roles with well-defined boundaries (how much and what sort of unofficial and official violence) both in the American and in the French situations examined? And how does this «theater» stand to «ritual» behavior? Is it more «spontaneous», more «invented», more «thought-out»? Are the actors more «in command» and less «moved by the usage»?

And what about «usage» or «sacrality», surely at the heart of what we are used to think of as ritual behavior? While we can certainly find all kinds of Christian antecedents in the Catholic view of the Eucharist and «primitive», anthropological/magic ones as well, for the eating of the characterizing attributes of the aristocrat-as-power (of «father» refused) in the episode Viola analyses, does it really look only to past experience? Or is it the result, too, of and elaboration in that borderline area of the mind where concepts are formulated as images and the acts ensuing are the result of thought, even if it is not

structured verbally as it has become conventional to require. The fact that the arm and (probably) heart are taken to another village and it is young men, not yet «fixed» into social roles, who act-out the «eating» of them, looks to me like something new, a departure (so much so that it is subsequently dismantled to a non-event by experienced political figures of the same «party»). The mutilation of the statue of the Virgin Mary, which Bianchi mentions, also took place outside of the village of those who did it. Was this «stepping out of the frame» – whether by taking someone else’s father – figure to bite or someone else’s mother figure to violate – the sign of the will to be new; was it, in fact, expressed thought as political theater? Again, the vein of black comedy and physical practical joke which appears here is present too in the «White Indians» and in much of the material coming from the world of artisans both in France and in America. What thought can we find in the «blue hen’s chicks» of the Southern backwoods (who desecrate the fallen Tories after King’s Mountain) and how do these «chicks» stand to the «Tom Cod» who is their élite contemporary? Certainly, both share the view that community and virility are central virtues.

Getting back to «people» and to «power», what still needs to be said is that an important part – perhaps the majority of whites – of the «people» who appear in these essays are intermediate strata, urban or rural. That is, they are not «everyone» and they are not «élites». They are also self-defined as «the people»; in America this may mean «nearly all white males» in the late 18th century and a narrower group by the second quarter of the 19th. Gross, Taylor, Sioli’s «people» are not Rediker and Linebaugh’s, though they are also not élites, nor are Grimsted’s or Sobel’s.

If «people» and «power» are at the same time rather shadowy concepts and very clear images as they appear before us situated in time and space in their specific instances, they are both – at least in the period which interests us here – inter-active. Each plays on the other and in this play the perceptions each has of «rights» and of «citizenship» are central to recourse to violence and determine the nature and degree of that violence.

It is a view of themselves as citizens having rights within organized, civil, society – within organized power – which moves all of the 18th century American groups and individuals we see engaging in violence in these pages. Typically, shaysites and whiskey rebels see themselves as participating in local, democratic government; they deem themselves majorities whose rights as self-governing citizens have been infringed or denied without reason. They are rebelling against laws or political practice which they judge to be «unjustified»: and, because they are unjustified, illegitimate. As Marco Sioli shows, their political procedure follows a definite pattern, perceived as legitimate *within* the republican context which the «state» is meant only to reflect. They differ from the élites governing the national scene in that they do not see republican procedure (popular presence in the governing process) as a mere administrative choice, operating only to designate those who *really* govern. They feel that governing them requires giving reasons for laws and not merely promulgating them and enforcing them.

In this, post revolutionary «rebels» are utilizing prior procedures, but they are doing more. They are *realizing* the implications of such customary behavior; it was tacitly a recourse to what we might call «residual sovereignty», an enforcement of «natural law» or «the compact» or «common law»: now it is viewed as the heart of republican government, as sovereignty itself. The steps which Sioli shows leading to final violence are: 1) meetings which draw up petitions, then signed individually by most adult males in the area involved; 2) the petitions are sent to the Assemblies and authorities who have made (and not explained) the offending law, so that they may be informed and may correct the law or reply; 3) when this first phase fails, local committees are formed, a network is set up, and the militia is alerted; at this point, pressure is brought to bear on individuals living in the area who are charged with carrying out the contested law (it is felt that they should, as members of the community, refuse to enforce the law or state why they do not); though «pressure» in the above sense may include some damage to persons or property, it tends to limited or «controlled» violence; 4) the militia is embodied and «shows» itself in a sort of political theater. Only after these steps does armed violence - revolt - occur, if indeed it occurs at all.

It is striking how different this procedure is from that which the twentieth century has repeatedly shown us and theorized as the way to armed popular revolt and whose steps are basically three: 1) terroristic episodes to destabilize government and create fear (these may be aimed at individuals of authority or at indiscriminate groups); 2) guerrilla war through armed bands which set up territorial bases and have, as well, secret net-works of organized supporters throughout the country/countries involved; 3) insurrection with mass involvement.

Eighteenth century American republican violence is the last recourse of a community which feels its own general government is not responsive to its dignity as a community of individuals who are citizens and therefore have rights. It is internal to a real republican discourse which is, at that moment, shaping a new kind of government. The «rebels» conceive of their behavior as an extension of debate on the nature and management of a republic and do not intend, apparently, to withdraw from the republic as state even while they take up arms against some of its leaders of the moment. Personally, I am struck by the very different aspect which American popular violence presents half a century or so later in the vigilantism examined by Grimsted.

The episodes are all local in their extension and do not call the general government into question. Violence is immediate and «reasoning» - or «motives» - are expressed together with or, more often, after it. The violence occurring is not at all controlled and aims at destruction of property and of individuals with no intent beyond eliminating them physically from the area in which they live.

While the term «vigilante» would seem to indicate a community which is protecting its values from danger and attentively making known to government that something negative has occurred, what is being indicated is not a

law and the negativity indicated is only indirectly that of governing authority. It is a part of the community itself which the vigilantes turn upon in a frenzy of social self-destruction. And the organized republican government is put under pressure to convalidate the violence and to «introyt» it as a legitimate expression of popular sovereignty, an «extension» of the application of law. Grimsted shows that the episodes pit a specific part of a local population against others and that this part is generally made up of «late-comers» who resent the old settlers who are «well-off» and occupy the best land or of intermediate people who are in a precarious situation economically or socially and find themselves uncomfortably similar to the already poor or to new incoming groups.

Oddly enough, this vigilante behavior, has a number of analogies to the twentieth century model briefly indicated above. It is in any case a far different phenomenon from the republican rebellion of the late 18th century. The American federal government was no longer in formation; it was a completed system, whose formalized procedure enshrined «republicanism», «majority rule» and «the people» as fount and center of «power», while assigning very clear – and increasingly ceremonial – occasions for their public presence. Is vigilantism, then, in some sense the sign of the end of a real role for «people» in «power»; the opposite and equal thrust of the empty center of the «mythic machine» of which Italian theorist Furio Iesi once wrote so eloquently? And, if there is something here, some pattern to discern, can it also, as Serge Bianchi's essay on «vandalism» in the Isle de France seems to suggest, be usefully sought for – and then employed – within revolutionary France (perhaps by looking further along into the 1790s and even to the Restoration)? These questions, it seems to me, are interesting and even exciting ones, upon which many of us might attempt to venture.